

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

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FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0977

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

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COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 0824

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: US, DJ, MPOL, PINS, ELTN

SUBJECT: ADDIS ABABA/DJIBOUTI RAILWAY

SUMMARY - THE ADDIS ABABA/DJIBOUTI RAILWAY HAS BEEN REPAIRED AND THE FIRST TRAIN SHOULD RUN JUNE 11. THE SECURITY SITUATION GIVES SOME GROUNDS FOR HOPE THAT THE RAIL CONNECTION CAN BE MAINTAINED, AND FURTHER STEPS TO NEGOTIATE A NEW BASIS FOR THE RAILROAD' OPERATIONS BETWEEN ADDIS AND DJIBOUTI ARE EXPECTED SHORTLY. USG SHOULD CONSIDER MAKING CLEAR TO THE SOMALI GOVERNMENT (GSDR) THAT GIVEN THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE GUERRILLA FORCES, WE WOULD VIEW RENEWED ATTACKS ON THE RAILWAY AS A KEY INDICATOR OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LIVE AT PEACE WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS. END SUMMARY.

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1. ACCORDING TO FRENCH AMBASSADOR BASTOUIL, THE RAILROAD HAS BEEN ENTIRELY REPAIRED AND THE FIRST RUN IS EXPECTED SHORTLY. (ANOTHER SOURCE INDICATES THAT THE FIRST TRAIN IS TO BE SENT ON JUNE 11, AND THAT THE AUTHORITIES HOPE TO SEND TWO PER WEEK EACH WAY DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS). PENDING A NEW AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DJIBOUTI GOVERNMENT (GROD) AND

ETHIOPIA, BASTOUIL EXPECTS THAT THE RAILROAD WILL RUN ACCORDING TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE EXISTING ACCORD WITH THE EXCEPTION, AS HE HAS TOLD ETHIOPIAN REPRESENTATIVES, OF ANY MILITARY RAIL TRAFFIC, WHICH IT WOULD BE POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GROD TO PERMIT.

2. SECURITY OF RAILROAD OPERATIONS: THE FRENCH OPTIMISTICALLY BELIEVE THAT THE SOMALI GUERRILLA THREAT CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY COUNTERED. THEY HAVE REPORTS THAT THE ISSA POPULATION IN ETHIOPIA, CAUGHT BETWEEN HAMMER AND ANVIL, ARE INCREASINGLY DESIREOUS OF REACHING AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT (PMGSE) TO THE DETRIMENT OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE WESTERN SOMALI LIBERATION FRONT (WSLF). FURTHER, IN ADDITION TO ETHIOPIAN UNITS PROTECTING THE RAILWAY, THE PMGSE, WITH THE SUPPORT OF LOCAL NOTABLES INCLUDING THE OUGAZ OF LHE ISSAS, HAS INCREASED SUPPORT FOR THE "GOSSA POLICE" (AN ETHIOPIAN-FUNDED TRIBAL POLICE UNIT WHICH HAS LONG BEEN USED TO GUARD ROADS AND BRIDGES) TO COUNTER THE WSLF THREATS TO THE RAILWAY. THIS FORCE NOW AMOUNTS TO SEVEN OR EIGHT HUNDRED MEN AND IS GROWING. DESPITE THESE AUSPICIOUS INDICATIONS, BASTOUIL IS CONCERNED THAT THE GOF HAS NOT YET EMPHASIZED GRAVITY WITH WHICH FRANCE WOULD CONSIDER A RENEWED SOMALI ATTACK ON THE RAILWAY. HE NOTED THAT THIS ISSUE WAS NOT RAISED DURING THE MEETING BETWEEN FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGAUD AND SOMALI FOREIGN MINISTER ABDURRAHMAN JAMA BARRE IN PARIS ON MAY 25. BASTOUIL IS SUGGESTING TO THE QUAI THAT THE POINT BE MADE CLEAR TO SIAD DURING HIS PARIS CONFIDENTIAL

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VISIT ON JUNE 15. HE BELIEVES IT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT THE SOMALIS AND THE WSLF BE CAUTIONED CONCERNING ATTACKS IN THE TERRITORY OF THE ROD WHERE THERE ARE SEVERAL POORLY GUARDED BRIDGES OF ANCIENT AND DELICATE CONSTRUCTION WHICH, IF DESTROYED, WOULD REQUIRE AT LDHST A YEAR TO REPAIR.

4. DJIBOUTI/ETHIOPIAN RAILWAY NEGOTIATIONS: THE INDEPENDENCE OF DJIBOUTI ALSO REQUIRES THAT REVISION OF THE JURIDICAL BASIS OF THE COMPANIE FANCO-ETHIOPIENNE. BASTOUIL SAYS THAT THE GROD INTENDS TO SEND A DELEGATION TO ADDIS SHORTLY TO DISCUSS RAILROAD MATTERS. THE NEGOTIATION OF A NEW UNDERSTANDING, HOWEVER, WILL FIRST REQUIRE A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE FIFTY PERCENT OF THE FRENCH SHARES, OF WHICH TWENTY SEVEN PERCENT ARE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND THE REST PRIVATELY OWNED. IT IS AGREED THAT THE GROD SHOULD HAVE THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT SHARE, BUT DJIBOUTI AUTHORITIES INSIST THAT THEY BE GIVEN POSSESSION OF THE PRIVATE SHARES AS WELL. SINCE THIS WOULD REQUIRE THAT ACTION OF CQE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, BASTOUIL HAS QUIETLY SUGGESTED THAT THE DJIBOUTI GOVERNMENT NATIONALIZE THE REMAINDER, PROVIDING REASONABLE COMPENSATION. THIS LAST, HOWEVER, COULD BE COMPLICATED BY THE GENERALLY POOR STATE OF THE

RAILROAD AND EQUIPMENT, ALREADY BURDENED BY A DEBT OF FOURTEEN MILLION DOLLARS.

5. COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION: THE SUCCESSFUL RESTORATION OF THE RAIL CONNECTION WITH ADDIS ABABA IS VITAL TO THE FUTURE STABILITY OF THE HORN. POLITICALLY, IT IS A SYMBOL OF THE RESTORATION OF A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL DJIBOUTI/ETHIOPIAN RELATIONSHIP. FROM THE ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW, IT WILL REDUCE THE PRESURE ON THE PORT OF ASSAB. IF THE CONNECTION CAN BE MAINTAINED, THE ETHIOPIAN NEED TO PROTECT THE COMMUNICATIONS LINK BY INCREASED POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN DJIBOUTI AND THREAT OF MILITARY ACTION WILL BE REDUCED. WHILE THE IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC BENEFIT TO DJIBOUTI WILL BE SLIGHT, OVER THE LONGER TERM, THE RAILROAD IS A KEY ELEMENT IN THE CREATION OF ANY SELF-SUSTAINING ECONOMY.
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I THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO IMPRESS UPON THE GSDR THAT WE LOOK TO THEM SPECIFICALLY TO DISCOURAGE ANY WSLF INTERFERENCE WITH THE RAILWAY, AND THAT THEIR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THIS REGARD WILL SERVE AS A KEY INDICATOR OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LIVE AT PEACE WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS.
SCOTT

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